

**The Role of a
Spirituality Support Group
in Reducing Caregiver Burden
Among Staff Caring for Terminally Ill**

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- **This study is supported by the
Washington DC VA Medical Center**

Background

- The challenges of working with medically complex persons with inadequate networks of social support, and multiple stresses and losses may be daunting to even the most seasoned of caregivers.
- Nursing home caregivers are often overwhelmed by the despair and sorrow encountered in the daily care of severely ill patients.
- Nurturing and supportive interventions enable staff to integrate skills and work toward an understanding of their own feelings as well as improve the care of people with advanced medical illness.
- Numerous studies have found that spirituality provides effective coping mechanisms for patients and caregivers.

Methods

- A monthly, interactive, multidisciplinary forum was developed in order for staff caregivers to have opportunity to:
 - reflect on important psychosocial and spiritual issues faced by patients
 - gain insight and support from fellow staff members
- Through an examination of caregiver narratives of their patients' experiences, the role of the health care provider, particularly in regard to challenging fear, was reviewed.

Setting



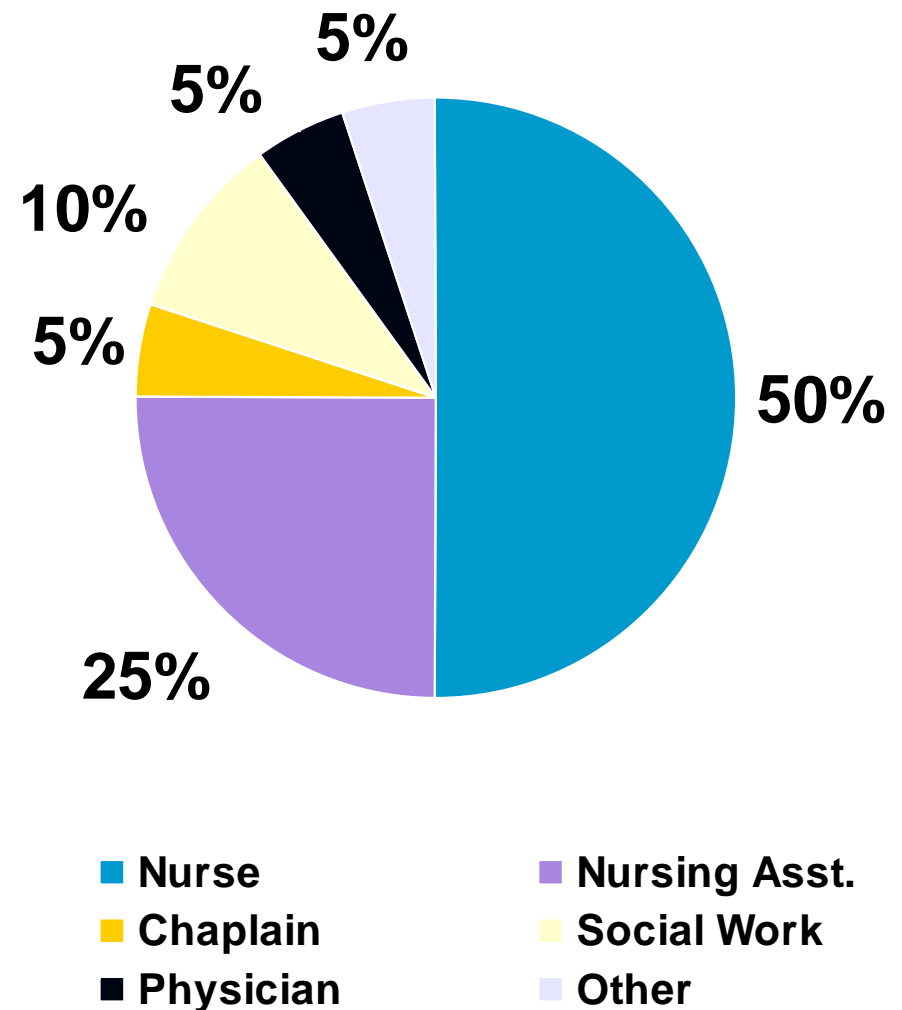
- Comprehensive Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
 - Dept. of Veterans Affairs
 - Washington, DC
- 120-bed facility
 - 108 long-term care
 - 20 hospice-palliative care
 - 12 geriatric-rehabilitation
- # annual admissions

Interdisciplinary Team

Discipline	# on staff
Chaplain	
Dietician	
Nurse (RN, LPN)	
Nurse Practitioner	
Nursing Assistant	
Pharmacist	
Physician	
Social Worker	
Therapist (Physical, Occupational, Speech/language, Recreation, Art/music)	

Results: Participants

- 6 month study period
- 6 meetings
- # of disciplines represented
- # of participants
 - Total
 - Average per meeting



Results: Topics Discussed

This group of providers reported:

- taking a vital clinical role as encouragers of patients' spiritual resources
- a crucial role of personal spiritual needs
- ability to foster growth and meaningful relationships with veterans facing end of life

Conclusion

- Health care professionals need to understand and address the psychosocial and spiritual difficulties of caring for patients in Nursing Homes facing terminal illness in order to provide good care